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THE USE AND DISPOSITION OF LAND IN ALBERTA

A DISCUSSION PAPER

Prepared for the:
Northern Alberta
Development Council

August 31, 1987

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31 August 1987

Our File: 59-42

Alberta Executive Council
Northern Development Branch
2nd Floor, Provincial Building
9621 - 96 Avenue
Peace River, Alberta
T0H 2X0

Attention: Mr. G.G. Archibald
Director, Research and Analysis

Dear Sir:

RE: Report on The Use and Disposition of Land in Alberta

This was a fascinating project that made us aware of the problems associated with agricultural land preservation in both Canada and the United States. Our focus was not on defining the problem statistically but rather reviewing other jurisdictions means of solving the problem.

The range in solutions is quite extreme from British Columbia's Agriculture Land Reserves to the Transfer of Development Rights in the United States. We have not recommended any one solution but rather discuss them as possibilities and as catalyst for the readers discussions.

We trust that you will find this report interesting and thought provoking. As always we have enjoyed working with the Northern Alberta Development Council and look forward to having the opportunity again in the near future.

Yours truly,

I.D. SYSTEMS LTD.

Robert N. Honsberger

R.N. Honsberger, M.C.I.P.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Concerns regarding the loss of agricultural land in Alberta have been brought to the attention of the Northern Alberta Development Council (NADC). In response to these concerns it has commissioned a report by I.D. Systems Ltd. to 'review practical alternatives to oversee the use and disposition of land in Alberta.'

As background to the report it is noted that the Environment Council of Alberta (ECA) conducted a major program of research and public hearings on the topic of 'Maintaining and Expanding the Agricultural Land Base in Alberta' in the early 1980s with a series of papers published between 1981 and 1984. The final report and recommendations were presented to the government in December 1984. The primary recommendation of the ECA was:

> That an Agricultural Resources Conservation Board be established, reporting to the Minister of Agriculture and charged with responsibility on behalf of the Government of Alberta for the conservation, maintenance and enhancement of the agricultural land base.

This recommendation was also the focus of a brief (#1641) submitted to the NADC by the Elk Point Surface Rights Association (EPSRA). In its presentation the EPSRA expressed concern over the surface damage to agricultural lands when they are needed for oil and gas explorations and the lack of a sole authority responsible for the protection of Alberta's agricultural land base. The Association called on the government to adopt the recommendation of the ECA and to implement the Agricultural Resources Conservation Board (ARCB) without delay.

This report will consider the ARCB as an alternative in the use and disposition of land in Alberta. However, other alternative means will also receive consideration including Provincial statutes and guidelines, taxation, transfer of development rights, zoning and agricultural districting.

This report is written in terms of land use and not farm management. Such issues of farm management as summerfallowing, irrigation, unimproved land, expansion, i.e., Peace River area, soil degradation including dry land salinity, nitrogen and organic matter loss, acidification and water/wind erosion are important and subject to numerous studies and research but are beyond the scope of this report.

In the sections that follow, this report will summarize the existing land use situation in Alberta as it pertains to agriculture, identify problems, briefly describe mechanisms from other jurisdictions which have attempted to address the problems, evaluate and assess these mechanisms in an Alberta context and make conclusions based on the findings.

2.0 EXISTING SITUATION

In Canada the authority to plan the use of private and public lands is in the provincial domain. The federal government's powers do not include direct regulation of land except for height regulations under the Aeronautics Act and the Indian Act, but it has the ability through programs and policies, to affect land and its use. For example federal programs affecting land have legislative regulations and do include the Agricultural and Rural Development Act (ARDA), the Farm Credit Act and the Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Act (PRFA). Generally the federal role is one of support of provincial initiatives and of reviewing and assessing the impact of federal actions if in conflict with provincial objectives.

Neither the Canadian Constitution nor its predecessor the British North America Act guaranteed property rights or compensation for those rights when taken by regulation. When the Constitution was being reviewed and ratified several interest groups made note of this omission but were unsuccessful in their efforts to have a guarantee of property rights included. This situation is fundamentally different from that in the United States where two constitutional amendments, the Fifth and Fourteenth, provide the general legal principles for the protection of property rights (Furuseth and Pierce 1982).

In Canada there is no constitutional guarantee of compensation either when land is compulsorily acquired by a government or when the right to use the property in a certain way is affected. Provincial governments, including Alberta, have passed expropriation acts to provide for the right to compensation when land is acquired by the government. These Acts generally do not provide for compensation where land use regulations affect (reduce) land values. This means that the province has the authority to regulate land

uses and is not legally obligated to compensate those affected by their decision.

Most provinces, including Alberta, have assigned the authority to regulate land use to regional authorities and rural and urban municipal governments. Since these authorities and local governments are creations of the Province, the Province retains the right to over-rule a decision or reclaim its authority to prescribe regulations. Generally, the local levels of government have a considerable degree of autonomy in their decision-making and are able to set policies and regulations according to their individual circumstances. These regulations and policies are prescribed in the Alberta Planning Act and consist primarily of land use (zoning) bylaws and General Municipal Plans. Figures 1a and b depict the heirarchy of land use authorities and documents in Alberta.

FIGURE 1 A

HEIRARCHY OF LAND USE AUTHORITIES

Government of Alberta

- Local Authorities Board

Alberta Planning Board

- Development Appeal Boards

Approving Authorities
(Regional Planning Commissions, Municipalities,
Alberta Municipal Affairs)

Cities, Towns, Villages, Hamlets, Rural Municipalities,
Improvement Districts and Municipal Districts

The heirarchy of documentation is as follows:

FIGURE 1 B

Alberta Planning Act (RSA 1980)

Regional Plans
(for most of the province)

General Municipal Plans

Land Use Bylaws

It is within these policies, bylaws and regulations that agricultural land use decisions are made. A report prepared by Alberta Agriculture (Krys 1983), which observed the influence of land use bylaws on agricultural land in Alberta, concluded that:

> What does appear certain is that there is no general theme found amongst the bylaws that agricultural uses have priority over other rural land uses. While this may not be significant considering the differing demands put upon different communities, neither is it a guarantee that the interests of the agricultural industry will always be met.

As there are different demands put upon different communities so are there different demands placed upon land. Agriculture is only one of several land uses competing for the same resource. Other uses include minerals (oil and gas, coal), recreation, industry, urban settlement, wildlife and habitat, fisheries, forestry, water resources, and transportation and communications. Each of these land uses is important in today's society. Any one can be as important as or more important then any other depending on the circumstances at the time and given the particulars of the

location. It is generally accepted that urban expansion takes place at the expense of agricultural land. What is not often considered is that agricultural expansion may be at the expense of forests, recreation lands or wildlife habitat. To sort out and allocate competing land uses, Alberta has developed a system which enables the various approving authorities to solicit and receive for their consideration the comments of various interest groups, departments and agencies. These approving authorities whether Regional Planning Commissions, Alberta Municipal Affairs or the Alberta Planning Board give consideration to the agricultural capability of the land in their deliberations. They do not make it their sole consideration but weigh it with a multitude of other factors before arriving at a decision.

A number of government departments have mandates that include agriculture. Foremost amongst these departments is Alberta Agriculture whose purpose is to facilitate the establishment or expansion of agriculture and agricultural industries. Other departments whose scope includes agriculture include Alberta Energy and Natural Resources, Albera Environment and Alberta Municipal Affairs. None of these departments have the preservation of agricultural lands as an overriding priority vis-a-vis other land uses. While it is logical to assume that Alberta Agriculture has the long term interests of agriculture at heart, the department does not have a veto over the conversion of agricultural land to non-agricultural purposes. It has only as much influence as any other department or agency in most circumstances where its comments are required.

There is no question that agricultural land is being lost from production due to other land uses let alone other factors such as soil degradation. Agricultural land is being lost to urban expansion through annexations, the development of country residential parcels, the fragmentation or subdivision of large parcels into smaller sizes, the expansion of the transportation system by

way of new roads, realignments and widenings, and through industrial developments (oil and gas wells, coal mines, aggregate mines, petrochemical plants). While new land is being brought into production it is often of poorer quality then that being lost. Canada Land Inventory (CLI) Class 1 land cannot be replaced by CL1 Class 4 on the basis of equal inputs of labor and other factors.

The preceding has outlined the various factors that affect land use. It is certainly a complicated system with inputs from the three levels of government, with agencies and departments affecting and applying policies and regulations and with other valuable land uses often competing for the same piece of the pie. While measures have been set up to give consideration to agriculture, it does not have any special mandate for its preservation. As a result of the demand for land from other uses the agricultural base most often is adversely affected. The loss of agricultural land is really a matter of perception. Those in decision-making capacities view for example, the widening of a rural road from 20 meters (66 feet) to 30 meters (100 ft.) in isolation. Individually it is not a lot of land lost. However, when similar decisions are made over thousands of miles across the province and over time, the incremental losses begin to add up. The following section will examine some of the problems and pressures facing agricultural land and those in decision-making positions responsible for it.

3.0 PROBLEMS

'If we could just move beyond the idea of agriculture being an undeveloped use of land.'[1] This quotation in a nutshell describes the general public's view on agriculture and why the loss of the agricultural land base in Alberta is not a major concern for the majority of Albertans in urban centres who see nothing but farmland for miles and miles whenever they travel outside of the cities. With the vision of an unlimited agricultural land base, news reports of falling grain prices due to a worldwide glut and relatively cheap retail food costs, it is easy to understand why the average urban dweller may only think of the boy who cried wolf when concerns over Alberta's declining agricultural land base are aired.

The problem of various land uses competing for agricultural land dates back to the settlement of the province. Alberta's pioneers were primarily farmers who located in places such as Edmonton, Peace River or Lloydminster. The best sites for settlements were on the best agricultural lands and, therefore, it has followed that future expansions continued to be on the best agricultural land.

As previously noted, local levels of government and approving authorities have been delegated the authority to deal with land use within their jurisdictions. Conceivably these bodies could prohibit the conversion or fragmentation of agricultural land. However almost all permit some type of subdivision and may consider rezoning agricultural land to any other land use.

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1 Edmonton Sun. July 9, 1986. J. Kolkman. Christian Farmers Federation of Alberta.

While one would think that these local officials, especially those in rural areas, would want to preserve their agricultural land base at any cost and would not entertain proposals that would adversely affect the agricultural economy, realistically, they are subject to pressure groups generally orientated toward growth. Conversely they must deal with long-time residents who need or want to subdivide a parcel for a new home for a child. These difficult decisions often do not preserve the integrity of the agricultural land base.

Local officials are also concerned with their tax base. Agricultural land is not highy taxed anywhere, let alone in Alberta. Consequently if local officials receive applications to develop high tax-yielding developments on agricultural land, who can fault them for approving it on the basis of job creation, tax revenue and other economic development multipliers? There is little incentive for local officials to retain agricultural land from a tax revenue viewpoint.

The last in the line of control over agricultural land is the farmer-owner. Ultimately he is the one with control over the use of his land, excepting of course if the government acquires it. The farmer's position toward the integrity of his agricultural land depends on his geographic location, age, financial situation and personal beliefs.

A farmer with land close to urban areas will be pressured to sell it to a speculator or developer. The value established will not be based on its agricultural productivity but, rather, on the basis of the highest and best use in an urban context. Should such a farmer decide to sell and remain in farming he will want to purchase farmland elsewhere and will be able to pay a higher price to get what he wants. This in turn drives up the price of land further distant

from the urban centre. Once a non-agricultural value is established it will affect similar parcels and may make their sale to bona fide farmers all but impossible. Should the farmer not sell, his neighbor might, and the first farmer will likely not be able to expand his operation on adjacent land. As well the first farmer may be subject to an annexation which, while not automatically curtailing his activities, will certainly hinder them as urban development encroaches upon his property.

Age also plays a key role in determining a farmer's inclinations toward his agricultural land. Young farmers just starting out need inexpensive land to begin their operations on. Unless they receive the land from their family they are unlikely to be able to afford land where the value has been influenced by urban pressures. To those farmers agricultural land should be valued based only on its agricultural productivity not on speculation.

In contrast to this is the farmer who is ready for retirement and whose sons and daughters show no interest in taking over the family farm. For him his retirement funds are likely invested in the land and the more he can sell it for the better off he will be. Who would blame him for selling to a speculator or developer at 100 times the agricultural value and, more importantly, who would prohibit such a sale from occurring by restricting the land use to agriculture?

This section has attempted to detail some of the problems that agricultural land is beset by. On a macro-scale it is one of public perception by essentially an urban population which does not see the relationship between the bread on it's table and the field of wheat behind the house. Historically the province was settled by farmers looking for the best farmland. Unbeknownst to them the land on which they settled is also the best land for urban growth, for transportation and communication corridors, for industrial developments and for resource extraction. As it turns out top

quality farmland is also top quality for most other competing land uses. Local officials can play a substantial part in the preservation of agricultural lands. However the pressures placed upon them from growth-orientated groups and the need for municipal tax revenue place them in an untenable position. Finally the farmer-owner is caught in a paradoxical position. When starting out or expanding he wants to pay for land based on its agricultural productivity. As retirement looms he wants to sell his land for the highest price it will bear, a price only justified by its future conversion to non-agricultural uses. These are not easy matters to reconcile. The following section will briefly describe possible solutions.

4.0 SOLUTIONS

In the preceding sections we have explained the situation and described the problems in dealing with the use and disposition of (agricultural) land in Alberta. This report started from the premise that there was a problem from an agricultural land use perspective, but we have not empirically supported this. This substantiation has been completed by others, most notably the Environment Council of Alberta and it is to their series of reports that refer anyone seeking specific data. We note that, based on our research, we find no quarrel with the premise that agricultural land use is subject to many land use pressures and problems and it is to these that the following solutions are addressed.

a) Non-Statutory Guidelines

Ontario, in 1977, developed 'Food Land Guidelines' to identify valuable farmland, and required local governments to alter their land use plans to conform with agricultural goals. These guidelines are a policy statement with no implementing legislation. The emphasis rests on local and regional governments to enact agricultural land preservation strategies. The onus is on developers and municipalities to show why it is in the long-range public interest to develop good farmland when other feasible alternatives are available.

The results arising from the guidelines have been mixed. Ontario, like Alberta, has a decentralized land use planning system which is undertaken primarily at the municipal or regional level. Local plans and their regulations often fall victim to the pressures of urban growth. There is considerable flexibility in justifying other land uses and these often take precedence over agricultural land requirements. Justification of land use is very subjective and is therefore open to dispute and argument at all levels.

The 'Food Land Guidelines' are primarily directed at the tender fruit soils of the Niagara region which are very definable and identifiable in the public's mind. Alberta does not have such a narrowly defined type of agricultural land and consequently the development and application of similar provincial guidelines may have even less success then in Ontario. A comprehensive provincial agricultural land preservation strategy in Alberta would be a start in putting more emphasis on agricultural values in Alberta's planning process.

b) **Taxation**

Agricultural land in Alberta is assessed based on its value for agricultural production. The use-value approach assesses property in its current use rather than its market or highest and best use. A criticism of this approach is that it enables land owners to enjoy the benefits of agricultural assessment until such time as they convert agricultural land, without any penalty or payment for conversion, to non-agricultural uses. The advantage to this approach is that bona fide farmers have a smaller tax burden in operating their businesses.

A variation of the use-value approach is deferred property taxes. The main clause in this approach is a tax recapture. Taxes are paid based on an agricultural assessment. If the land is converted to a non-agricultural use back taxes that would have been due without the deferral are assessed.

A third tax-based approach is the restrictive agreement program where the landowner voluntarily restricts the use of his land to agriculture for a specified period of time, i.e., 10 years. In return for the land use covenant the government agrees to specific tax benefits. The objective of these types of programs is to keep farms in agricultural use. Several years notice and repayment of

benefits are usually required in order for the farm owner to break the agreement. The intention of the recovery provision is to penalize the owner/purchaser for taking land out of agricultural usage.

Tax policies, as a means of protecting agricultural land, have been popular in the United States and in most Canadian provinces. Their popularity, however, should not be considered as a measure of their success in preserving agricultural land. The problems with tax policies are twofold. First, the financial benefits of reduced taxes or tax credits are minimal compared to the potential of extraordinary gains to be had from the sale of developable land. Secondly the eligibility for various tax programs either excludes bona fide farmers or conversely includes speculators, hobby farmers and developers allowing them to benefit from them as well. An example of the latter is the current practice of developers and speculators in Alberta's urban areas who lease out to farm operators their serviced, but unbuilt parcels which are more than one acre in size. Since these parcels are being farmed application is made, and usually granted, to have the parcel assessed on an agricultural basis. Consequently they benefit from lower holding costs while awaiting better market conditions in which to develop the land.

These problems restrict the usefulness of tax policies in keeping agriculture land used for agricultural purposes. Consequently tax policies do not do much to prevent agricultural land from changing to a higher value usage.

c) **Development Rights**

As a means of land use planning various authorities in the United States use a concept of development rights and the ability to purchase and/or transfer those rights. This is similar to the legal

separation of oil and gas rights in Alberta where the Province 'sells' the rights. It is also similar to the transfer of density requirements in the downtowns of most major Canadian cities. Under this concept, a landowner could acquire or sell the development rights to his land at a market-based value to private interests or public agencies.

One approach used in the Unites States involves the purchase of development rights to agricultural land by the government. Title remains with the farmers, who are free to do with the land as they please, except to develop it or sell it for any purpose other than agricultural. This is a popular program with farmers who receive fair compensation for their rights to develop their land. The public benefits in that the agricultural economic base is preserved.

The major disadvantage of this approach is its cost, as the public has to pay for the development rights. In this regard it can be compared to land banking programs only it involves agricultural land rather than housing and industrial land.

A variation of the development rights approach is the designation of an area as strictly agricultural in perpetuity and the establishment of development rights to it. Poorer agricultural lands would be designated as development districts with the possibility that they might be developed at greater densities if additional development rights were acquired. As a result a supply and demand of development rights would be created and the market would determine their allocation between vendor and purchaser. This approach allows the preservation of agricultural land and directs development to poorer agricultural lands.

Since the development rights concept is American, it is important to recall that, in the United States, the right to hold property is a constitutional principle. In Canada, as was noted in Section 2,

land owners are no more then tenants of the Crown and, as a result, the Crown is not obligated to compensate an 'owner' for actions of the Crown even if they were to reduce the value of the owner's land. To put it another way the Province, technically, could designate any land as agricultural and prohibit any non-agricultural use without regard to the owners investment. While convention and political realities dictate otherwise the Province is not obligated to compensate owners for their development rights because the rights do not exist in the first place.

d) **Legislation**

British Columbia was the first province to introduce legislation designed to protect and preserve agricultural lands. All lands assessed as farmland for tax purposes, zoned for agricultural use and with a CLI rating of 1, 2, 3 or 4 were designated in 1972/73 as agricultural land reserves. The land within the reserves was to be kept in agricultural use and could not be subdivided nor have its use changed to one incompatible with farming.

An Agricultural Land Commission (ALC) was established to consider applications to exclude land from the reserves and a Farm Income Assurance Act was passed to ensure that farmers whose land was frozen for agriculture would be able to meet the costs of production. The ALC originally had a broad land use mandate and could consider comprehensive land use planning issues. The program, although restrictive, was well received by those it impacted. Over 80% of the owners of reserve land supported the system (Gillis 1980).

The primary benefit to the farm owner was the degree of security it gave him in the long-term productivity of his holdings. Consequently he was more inclined to invest in long-term improvements such as new machinery, fencing, drainage and irrigation.

Since its inception changes to both the reserve system and its administration have restricted its focus and mandate strictly to the preservation of farmland. With the narrowing of its mandate the protection of agricultural land became more difficult because the ALC could no longer consider agriculture in context with other land use needs. Over all the reserve system is considered as having achieved its goal of preserving British Columbia's agricultural land base and of directing growth of non-agricultural land uses to areas outside of the reserves. It should be noted, however, that British Columbia as well as Ontario has readily definable and identifiable tender-fruit soils which make the delineation between prime and non-prime agricultural land more recognizable. Such demarcation may not be possible in Alberta.

In 1978 Quebec passed 'An Act to Preserve Agricultural Land'. It establishes agricultural zones across the province and sets up the appropriate administrative bodies. The criteria which it bases its decisions on are as follows:

> The commission shall particularly take into consideration the biophysical conditions of the soil and of the environment, the possible uses of the lot for agricultural purposes and the economic consequences thereof, and the repercussions that the granting of the application would have on the preservation of agricultural land in the municipality and the region, and on the homogeneity of the farming community and farming operations.
>
> R.S.Q. Chapter P-41.1

Quebec's legislation is indicative of the importance placed on agricultural land by that government.

e) Zoning

In Alberta, and in most other jurisdictions, zoning is the traditional mechanism used to protect agricultural lands. In some areas only agricultural uses are permitted (exclusive use) while in others, non-farm development can occur if it meets specified criteria and is a use that is compatible with agriculture (non-exclusive). The key to agricultural zoning is the extent to which it regulates and controls non-farm uses in an agricultural area. If the zoning is too permissive, then the objective of protecting agricultural land is compromised.

An exclusive agricultural zone prohibits any non-farm buildings or activities. Its major advantage is that it eliminates or reduces the conflict between farm and non-farm land uses. This type of zoning is not seen in Alberta judging by the findings in Alberta Agriculture's study of land use bylaws (Krys 1983). It is a difficult zoning to establish because both farm owners and development interests would oppose bylaws which prevent land use conversions from agricultural to non-agricultural.

The non-exclusive type of agricultural zoning is prevalent in Alberta. This type of zoning permits non-farm uses but prefers agricultural uses. Regulations limit the amount and intensity of non-agricultural development, i.e., parcel size minimum/maximum, number of subdivisions per quarter sections, etc.

Zoning, while a possible solution, has not as yet proven to be effective. A major concern is its permanence as land can be rezoned relatively quickly by a local council. Given the pressures local governments are faced with, as was described in Section 3, one cannot expect them to forgo tax revenue gains in return for the possible longer term public benefit of preserving agricultural lands.

f) Agricultural Districting

The concept of agricultural districting was developed in New York State. A district is a voluntary association of adjacent landowners who enter into a contract with the government and agree to maintain the agricultural production of their land for 10 years, for example, with options to renew the contract. In return for their commitment the farm owners receive certain benefits including lower property and state taxes, protection from local government actions that would restrict their farm operation, limits on public infrastructure investment that would encourage non-farm development, eg., water and sewer systems, paved roads, and state agency regulations that support agricultural land uses.

This districting is based on the concept that if farmers voluntarily initiate a mechanism where farming is the only activity and where they are protected from factors detrimental to farming, they will keep their land agricultural. However, as with the previous examples of tax incentives and restrictive agreements, the pressure of the dollars available for non-agricultural land uses generally renders voluntary districts ineffective in preserving agricultural land.

g) Agricultural Resources Conservation Board (ARCB)

The idea behind this board is equivalent to the Energy Resources Conservation Board (ERCB). Its function, as proposed in Agricultural Land and Canada's Future (Bentley 1981) is to have control over non-agricultural uses of agricultural lands. Application for non-agricultural uses of such lands would go to the ARCB which would hold public hearings and engage research experts to assess what is in the best long-term public interest. '(Agriculture) would be recognized as a natural resource of fundamental importance; the

preservation, use and management of which must be decided in the long-term national interest' (Bentley 1981).

The Environment Council of Alberta's recommendation to estabish an ARCB was not quite as adamant as Bentley's. The ECA saw the ARCB as an advisory board providing leadership, education and co-ordination in the agricultural sector.

The theory of having a board whose sole mandate is agricultural is laudable. However, one has to wonder whether or not that function is not already served by a variety of departments including Alberta Agriculture and, to a lesser extent, by Alberta Municipal Affairs. Would the ARCB simply be a duplication of existing, albeit fragmented, authorities whose mandates include protecting agricultural lands?

The requirement for an ARCB is based on the fact that agricultural land is being wasted, lost and destroyed. The writer does not dispute this but wonders if in times of surpluses on the world food market combined with low grain prices, that the public's perception may well be that agricultural land is far in excess of what is needed. While perhaps shortsighted that perception coupled with this province's love affair with the job-producing oil and gas industry can only lead one to see why the oil and gas industry has such statutory rights and why the ERCB is so powerful.

In the event that an ARCB be established there are several questions that should be asked.

1. Should it have the authority to block, stop or amend the conversion of agricultural land to non-agricultural uses? That is, should it dictate on what lands oil/gas wells could be drilled and how those well sites are to be accessed?

2. If the ARCB were to have this authority would a compensation fund also be required for those farm owners who are adversely impacted by its decisions?

3. Should the ARCB and the ERCB be equal bodies with disputes between them settled by Cabinet? Or, if the ARCB was subservient to the ERCB how would that be different from the current system of land use approving authorities?

4. If the ARCB were to come in conflict with other land uses, eg., forestry, urban centres, recreation, should the other land uses have their own and equally powerful boards?

The concept of an ARCB is valid but fraught with problems. If it doesn't have enough power it will not be much more then a compilation of the various authorities and agencies whose mandates partially include agriculture. Conversely, if it has enough power to protect and preserve agriculture land will it not do so to the eventual detriment of other land uses including oil and gas, forestry, recreation and urban centres?

5.0 CONCLUSION

The preceding section has provided several different examples and variations of means and mechanisms designed to protect and preserve agricultural land. Each has its own merits and its own disadvantages and each may or may not be applicable in whole or in part to Alberta. The objective of this report was to produce a review of practical alternatives to oversee the use and disposition of land in Alberta. The preceding meets that objective.

A common thread that ran through all the material researched was the need for leadership and direction by the senior levels of government. This is not meant to imply that local governments are not doing an adequate job in protecting the agricultural land base but rather that provincial support for the preservation of agricultural land would make local government decisions concerning agricultural land easier.

Whatever the particular course of action, it is essential to have the support of the public if agricultural preservation is to be initiated and successful. The general public must be convinced of the need to protect farmland and of the relationship between the loaf of bread on their table and the field of wheat behind their home. Public support is needed to initiate an agricultural land preservation program and to maintain its goals. Self-interest groups do not have a wide enough basis of support to either initiate or maintain such a program. Without the continuing interest of the public any such agricultural land preservation program will lessen the program's impact over time.